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Children's Changing Urban Lives: A Comparative New Zealand–Pacific Perspective

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ABSTRACT Pacific Island countries are undergoing processes of urbanization and globalization. This paper asks what these processes mean for children's lived realities and for urban planning in the Pacific. It reports on findings from a study undertaken with children aged 9–13 years in schools in Suva, Fiji, and Dunedin, New Zealand, that looked at children's travel, safety, neighbourhood relationships and how they use their local urban environment. This research presents information and understandings that can inform the development of urban areas and enable planners to respond more effectively to meeting the needs of children living in a rapidly urbanizing Pacific.

An Urbanizing Pacific

One of the foremost writers on Pacific development opens a recent article with the following perturbing words: "Predictions for the future of small islands and island states are invariably pessimistic" (Connell 2010, 115). Certainly the rates of poverty, outmigration and the uncertain future for many states in the face of current and potential climate change make Pacific Islands' future possibly tenuous and definitely confronting. Children will be particularly at risk in the Pacific given its vulnerability in the face of climate change and sea level rise, factors that will continue to propel urbanization (Lawler and Patel 2012). Within the Pacific it is expected that by 2020 the population will be predominantly urban (Storey 2006; Donnelly and Jiwanji 2010). What makes this development especially interesting and indeed challenging is that the 22 countries that make up the Pacific Islands had no urban tradition before European settlement (Bedford 2012) and for most urbanization is recent and rapid in its development. Further, the catalysts driving the inexorable move towards urbanization have largely been responses to negative stimuli: poverty, lack of services and opportunities in rural areas and, on the outer islands, climatic and environmental changes, all of which in turn add to pressures on already struggling urban centres.

At the centre of this scenario lie the children of the Pacific. The Pacific countries have a strong youth bias in their demographic make-up, with some 40% of the population being aged 0–18 years (UNICEF 2011). These two factors—a

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rapidly urbanizing population and a very youthful population—mean that urban centres are especially important environments for children who are increasingly likely to grow up in them and whose health and well-being are increasingly being determined by the character of that environment.

A Tale of Two Cities

Between 2010 and 2012 a group of researchers from the University of Otago and the University of the South Pacific undertook research in which they interviewed children aged 10–13 years about their experiences of living in an urbanizing Pacific, focusing on issues of neighbourhood, mobility, social connections and representations of their environment. This paper focuses on the experiences of children who are growing up in Suva (the population for the greater Suva area is estimated at 240,000; UN-Habitat 2012), the capital city of Fiji. The Fiji study builds on a comparable study undertaken in 2006 and 2008 with children living in Dunedin, New Zealand (population of 120,246; Department of Internal Affairs 2013). Key characteristics of the two cities are shown in Table 1. The use of data from the two cities facilitates the process of identifying those factors and elements in the two quite different urban environments that impact on and help shape children’s lives. A considerable body of knowledge exists from the earlier Dunedin studies onto which the current paper builds (Freeman 2010; Freeman and Vass 2010). Though data are used from both cities, the primary focus is on understanding factors pertinent to the urbanization process evident in Fiji.

Table 1. Key characteristics of the two case study cities

Dunedin	Suva
1. Regional urban centre with a harbour, the sea and surrounded by hills	1. Capital city with a harbour, the sea and on a coastal peninsula surrounded by hills
2. Main population group is European, but also significant populations of Maori, Pacific Island, Asian and European immigrants	2. Main population groups are indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian
3. Dunedin population 120,246; stagnant due to a declining population and medium to low density	3. Greater Suva 244,000 and rising population
4. Major issues include poverty, social polarization and a stagnant economy	4. Major issues are a high urban density and overcrowding, a limited urban land supply, lack urban finance, poor waste management, traffic congestion and climate change vulnerability. Some 80% of those in squatter settlements fall below the poverty line
5. Excellent infrastructure and service provision	5. Suva is 90% connected to the water supply; also serviced by roads, electricity supplies and health services, though these generally lacking in rural, outlying and squatter settlements
6. Main sources of employment are the university, Cadbury’s factory, education and health providers, with some tourism income in summer	6. Economy is struggling as a consequence of political instability; the main sources of revenue are tourism and agriculture—sugar, forestry, also subsistence economies
7. Limited public transport—mainly buses; high levels of car ownership	7. Large and well-used bus and taxi network

The Pacific–Fiji Focus

The information provided by the children in this study offers important perspectives that urban designers, planners, service providers and others whose work determines the shape of children's urban living spaces would do well to take note. Fiji is at an early developmental stage in the urbanization process by global standards, and again by global standards it has a small population. Fiji and the Pacific Islands as a whole, therefore, should offer urban designers an opportunity to intervene in the formative phase of urbanization to contribute to the creation of positive urban living environments and to avoid some of the negative attributes associated with urbanization processes occurring elsewhere in the developing world. This paper begins by examining urbanization processes generally as they relate to the Pacific and specifically to Fiji. It then examines the role of children in urban development and the need for urban designers and planners to adopt a child-focused perspective. The final section presents and discusses the results of the Fiji–Dunedin research. The focus is on the Fijian results with the Dunedin data included as a useful comparative. In contrast to New Zealand, which has a growing body of child focused research (e.g. Collins and Kearns 2010; Freeman 2010; Ergler, Kearns, and Witten 2013; Witten et al. 2013), there is minimal research on the urban context in Fiji generally and none on children's experiences of urban form. With reference to urban planning in the Pacific, Storey (2006) for example, talks of a "policy paralysis", identifying a lack of focus on urban issues and needs from government. The Asia Development Bank report points to the difficulties caused by a lack of research and the absence of "reliable, measurable data" (Asia Development Bank 2012, 58). It will be argued here that the case of talking to children provides data that give unique and valuable insights into urban living which can usefully inform the process of urban development. Further, in the case of Fiji these data and accompanying insights can be used to begin redressing the current invisibility of children in urban planning and design.

Children and Urban Planning and Design

Traditionally children have been seen as passive recipients of urban planning, impacted by the urban environment but not themselves seen as able to take part in influencing the shaping of cities. The 1970s saw the seminal works of Ward (1978), Hart (1979) and Moore (1986), the first researchers to try to see city functioning from a child's perspective. It was only in the late 1990s that planners and those with an interest in urban development (Boyden and with Holden 1991; Freeman, Henderson, and Kettle 1999; Woolley et al. 1999) began to give any real attention to recognizing children as an active and formative influence on cityscapes and to explore the symbiotic relationship between city form and children's well-being. However, the focus has been uneven in its application. A study of planning and children in New Zealand found planners focused on education and recreation when considering the needs of children in planning practice, paying little attention to fundamental needs such as housing, transport, retail and health services (Freeman and Aitken-Rose 2005a, 2005b). This is a major concern in cities such as Suva where basic needs such as water, housing, health and education provision can be absent or of poor quality. The structure and features of the urban environment, its 'physical capital' and how this supports or frustrates children's urban experience remains poorly understood.¹

Better understood and the focus of a growing body of work are children's urban social and general environmental relationships. Since the early work of Ward, Moore and Hart, there has been a developing body of work in a number of key areas, whose themes will be addressed in the Suva study. The three main areas in which research has become comparatively developed are: (1) play and outdoor activity, notably the decline in both (Gill 2007; Malone 2007; Karsten and van Vliet, 2005); (2) independent mobility and travel with a particular focus on children's journeys to school, again with a focus on the decline in independence (Hillman, Adams, and Whitelegg 1990; Tranter 2006; Derbyshire 2007; Fyrhi et al. 2011); and (3) children's participation in planning practice (Driskell 2002; Malone and Hartung 2010). The last of these is especially relevant in this research as it points to new ways of researching and working with children. Particularly notable is the emphasis on socially informed approaches.

Children's social capital is part of an emergent body of research that argues a strong case for children as catalysts and indeed beneficiaries of neighbourhood social capital (Offer and Schneider 2007; Weller and Bruegel 2009). This approach emphasizes that only through hearing children's voices can their true experiences be revealed. In this regard the 'new social studies of childhood paradigm' is instructive, based on the following arguments (James and Prout 1990, 8–9, cited in Ansell 2006):

- Childhood is socially constructed.
- Childhood is a variable of social analysis that cannot be entirely separated from other social variables, e.g. gender, class, ethnicity.
- Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the concerns of adults.
- Children are actively involved in the construction of their own social lives.
- Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of children as it allows children's voices to be heard.
- The development of a new paradigm is a contribution to the process of reconstructing childhood in society.

This paradigm provides a useful entry point into children's lives and has enabled planners and urban designers to comprehend how to design spaces that work better for children. This paradigm was adopted as part of the 'Growing Up in an Urbanising World' project, which looked at children's experiences of urbanization in eight very different countries and living environments. It was found that "Despite the diversity of the countries and places where they live, there is remarkable consensus about the qualities that create places where children and adolescents can thrive, versus conditions that make them feel alienated and marginalised" (Chawla 2002, 17). Neither the Pacific nor New Zealand was part of this study. The commonly identified characteristics for neighbourhood satisfaction are summarized in Table 2. They indicate that for children key concerns are providing basic needs, safe social neighbourhoods with places to play and meet people and that enable mobility. On the negative side, lack of safety, heavy traffic, alienation and lack of services are concerns that come to the fore. Interestingly matters that planners and urban designers usually devote much of their attention to, namely urban form, housing type, location of retail and other facilities, that are important determinants of urban character do not feature strongly in the list. The findings from the Growing Up in an Urbanising World project provide a useful starting point for analysing what is happening in urban

Table 2. Growing up in the city: what makes cities work—not work for children?

<i>Characteristics of neighbourhood satisfaction</i>	<i>Characteristics of neighbourhood alienation</i>
Safety and freedom of movement	Stigma and social exclusion
Social integration	Boredom
Variety of interesting activity settings	Fear of harassment and crime
Peer-gathering places	Racial tension
Cohesive community identity	Heavy traffic
Green areas	Uncollected rubbish and litter
Provision of basic needs	Lack of basic services
Secure tenure	Sense of political powerlessness
Tradition of community organizing and self-help	

Source: Adapted from Chawla (2002).

Suva and how children are using the city. Finally this paper asks whether children’s own perceptions of their city accord with the view that “Predictions for the future of small islands and island states are invariably pessimistic” (Connell 2011, 115).

The Suva–Dunedin Study: Methodology

In 2006 the authors began interviewing children aged 9–11 years living in the city of Dunedin to ask them about how they used the city and their experiences of the urban environment. This paper includes the results from 134 children attending eight schools located in different parts of Dunedin city, and with different socio-economic characteristics. In 2010, using the same methodologies and the same interview questions, 70 children aged 10–13 years from three schools in Suva were interviewed. As was the case in Dunedin, the Suva schools were in different parts of the city and each had a different socio-economic character. Of the three Suva schools, one was an Indo-Fijian school, one a church school attended by Indigenous Fijian² children and the third was a middle-class school with a more varied school population, though still predominantly Fijian children.³

Two methods were used to gather data. The first was a class exercise in which the children were asked to draw a map of their neighbourhood that was to show their home, if possible their school and all the places they use or think are important in their lives. Next the children were interviewed individually and asked questions about their home and family, their school, how they get about and where they go, their social life, any activities they undertake and their neighbourhood. The interviews were conducted in English by local researchers also familiar with the local languages and the local environment. The same ethics procedures were followed in Suva and Dunedin schools with parental and child consent forms being completed by participating children.

Results

Home and City Characteristics

The first part of the interview tried to establish factors that could influence children’s city use such as socio-economic status, travel modes, ethnicity, family size, type of neighbourhood and which school students attended. Clear

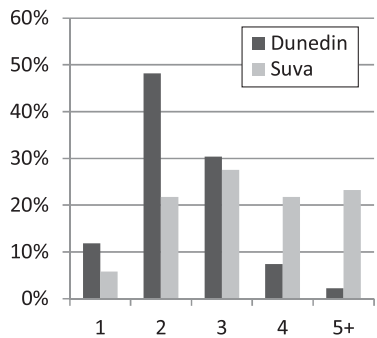


Figure 1. Number of children in the home.

differences emerged from the findings between the Suva and Dunedin children. In Suva, family size, in terms of both the number of children and adults in the family home, was larger (Figure 1). Some 65% of families had three or more adults compared with fewer than 10% in Dunedin. However, Indo-Fijian families were closer to Dunedin families with reference to the number of children (Figure 1). Indigenous Fijians generally had more children than either Indo-Fijian or Dunedin families. The other major difference was in travel. Car ownership is far lower in Suva families: nearly half have no access to a car (7% have no car in Dunedin). Suva children were travelling further to school, usually independently of adults and usually by bus; over half travelled more than 3 kilometres (Figure 2). Some children had extremely long bus journeys. Children in Suva were less likely to attend the local school with only 32% doing so compared with 67% in Dunedin. Attending the local school and level of independence (walking) were found to be two of the primary influences on social connection to neighbourhood for Dunedin children, yet in Suva the trend seemed to be moving away from these key independent mobility and social connection promoting factors.

Neighbourhoods

The Dunedin study established a strong link between the existence of a clearly defined neighbourhood, higher levels of independence and social connectedness.

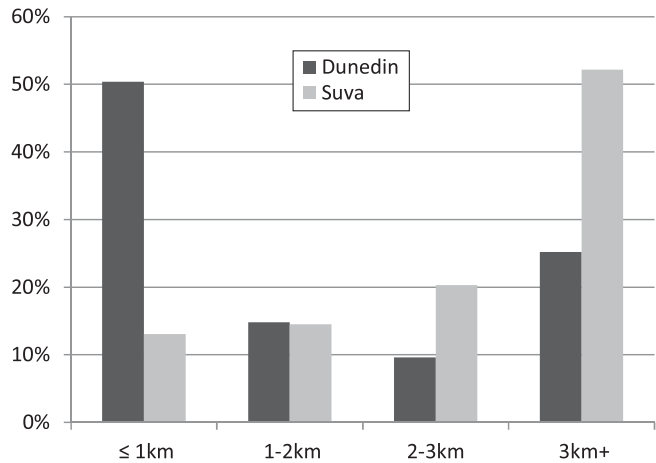


Figure 2. Distance travelled to school.

Urbanization processes in Fiji are blurring neighbourhood boundaries through sprawl, the growth of informal settlements and infill development; nonetheless, most children could identify with a particular neighbourhood. The children were asked a number of questions about their neighbourhood including: was it friendly, safe, had they visited neighbours in the last week, and could they go to neighbours for help? The answers given were almost identical to those of the Dunedin children with overwhelmingly positive responses (Figure 3). In Suva 88% indicated their neighbourhoods were friendly, 76% that they were safe, 87% that there was someone they could go to for help, some 68% had visited a neighbour in the past week and 84% help their neighbours. Common forms of help were sweeping the compound,⁴ picking up rubbish, helping in the garden, lending things, sharing food and looking after children. The concerns identified in the literature of a reduction in feeling safe in neighbourhoods and declining neighbourhood connection and belonging (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Forrest and Bridge 2006) were not concerns that the authors encountered coming from the children. What is also interesting is that children's positive responses are consistent over a wide range of urban forms: New Zealand outer city suburbs, inner suburbs, Fiji inner city suburbs, squatter settlements and outer suburbs. One difference between Suva and Dunedin that did emerge was that in Suva children felt safe during the day but not at night, and in later interviews the question asked about safety was changed to differentiate between day- and night-time. Problems such as people swearing, drunkards, noise, fighting and crime were frequently

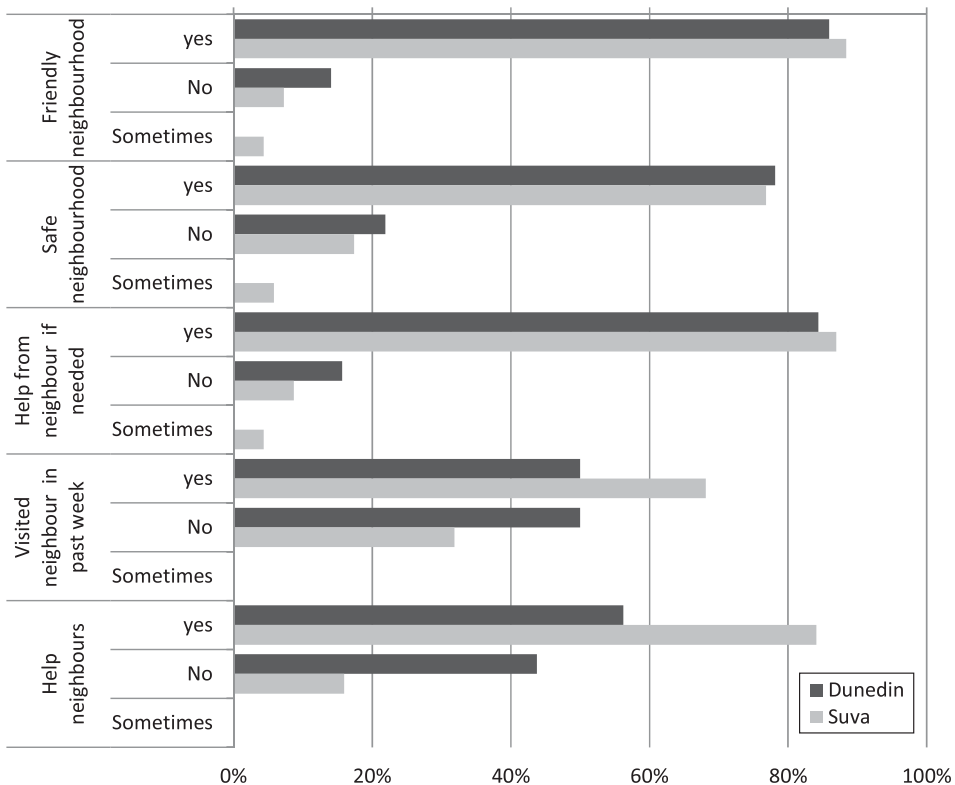


Figure 3. Children's social experiences of their neighbourhood.

mentioned by children as the primary reason for them not liking their neighbourhood; these were issues usually associated with night-time. One student mentioned that a girl was raped at the back of their shop, another that they could not go to the playground when ‘boys’ were drinking. Whilst these and other problems were noted by most children, they still regarded their neighbourhoods as being friendly and generally safe.

Children were further asked about what they liked and disliked about their neighbourhood. In both cities, people were the most important overall positive factor, including friends being available and friendly, helpful neighbours (Figure 4). In the interviews Dunedin children were far more interested in where friends lived, whether they went to the same school and whether they could access them after school. Suva children also played with friends in their neighbourhood, but play and such connections tended to be neighbourhood based rather than school based. For instance, in New Zealand a commonly given reason for attending a school was that friends went there; this was not a common response in Suva where reasons for school choice were more likely to be that “it is a good school” and/or easy to access. Neighbourhood play was invariably outside with infrequent visiting of friend’s houses except to help with

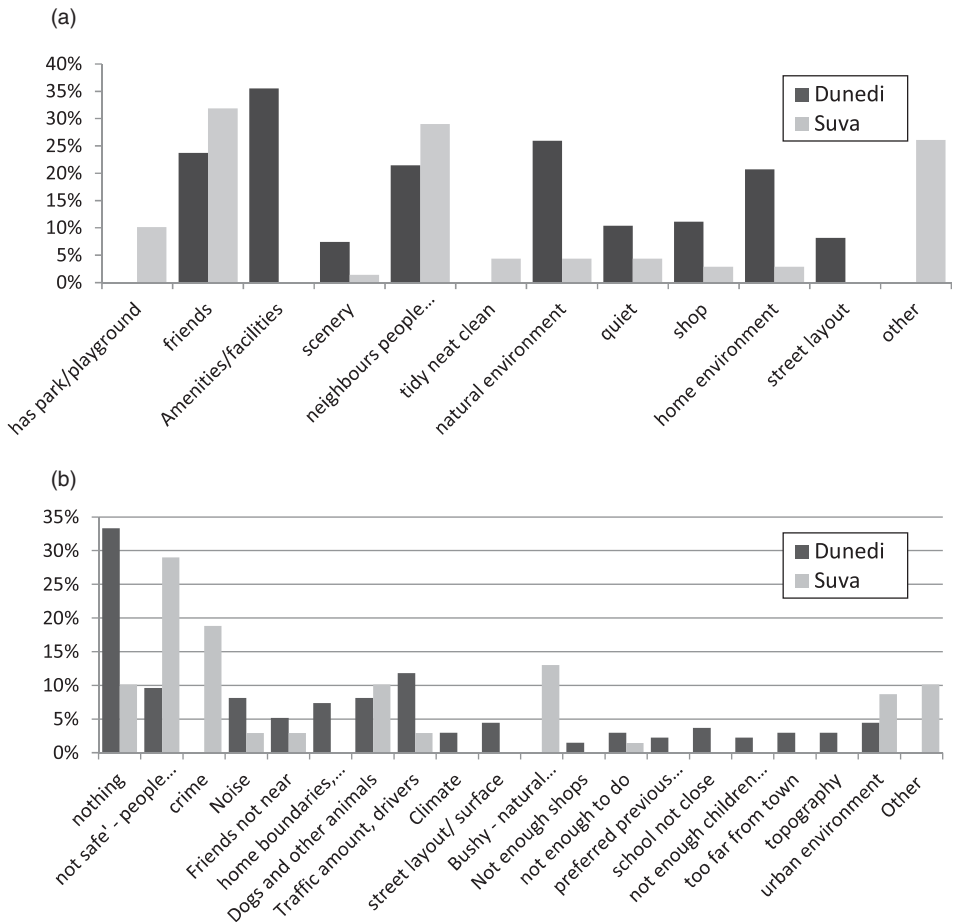


Figure 4. What children (a) liked and (b) disliked in their neighbourhoods.

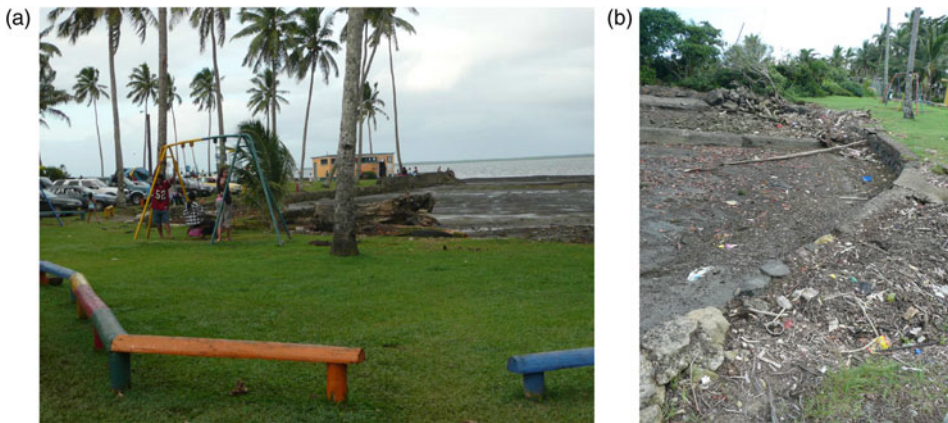


Figure 5. (a) Suva point is the main beach used by the children for swimming; and (b) the major rubbish pollution present at this beach.

chores such as “raking the compound”. Ethnic differences did emerge with Indo-Fijian children having fewer local friends and rarely going outside their garden/compound to play and often did not seem to play with Fijian children. Children living in communal compounds, e.g. the Police compound or in groups of houses/flats in a joint compound, seemed particularly to value the easy opportunities this provided for meeting friends and playing.

Suva children more often mentioned disliking their natural environment, giving reasons such as having to walk through muddy, swampy ground to get to school. On the plus side they did use the rivers and Suva Point for swimming even though the beach has high levels of rubbish pollution and does not at all resemble the sandy white beaches for which Fiji is renowned (Figure 5a and b). Dunedin children were more likely overall to talk positively about the natural environment and to refer to amenities such as sports grounds. The most frequent response for Dunedin children in the neighbourhood dislikes was “nothing”; for Suva it was factors relating to crime, alcohol and lack of safety. Very few children in either city identified matters relating to planning and facilities such as the quality of housing, roads, availability of shops, health centres, schools and other services as being important in their neighbourhood assessments.

How Children Use their Neighbourhood and the Wider City

To gain a sense of children's lives in their neighbourhood the authors asked them what they did each day after school and at weekends. Indicative examples are given in Table 3, which shows selected typical responses where Indo-Fijian children are most likely to play at home (in the compound; child 1) and visit relatives at the weekend, whilst Fijian girls usually help parents with housework before playing (child 3) and boys generally play sports with friends in the neighbourhood (children 2 and 4). Many Indo-Fijian children mention going to temple, but this is not for as long or as universal as church for Fijian children. All Fijian children spend one full weekend day, usually Sunday, at church. Church is a significant part of Fijian life and culture (Figure 6c). Many Fijian homes still have their own ‘garden’ area with cassava, dalo (taro) and coconuts being the key crops.

Table 3. Examples of daily life without school activities across a week for four children; most examples during the week just cover after school time.

	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
1. Indo-Fijian girl	Homework, television, play in the compound	Homework, television, play in the compound	Homework, television, play in the compound	Homework, television, play in the compound	Village 6 (cinema) with parents	Go to grandmother's house with parents	Go to grandmother's house with parents
2. Fijian boy	Morning walk with father, after school rugby and volley ball with friends	Morning walk with father, after school rugby and volley ball with friends	Morning walk with father, after school rugby and volley ball with friends	Morning walk with father, after school shopping with mother	Swimming at an aquatic centre with friends from school	Play with neighbouring kids in the compound, watch movies	Church, go to grandparents' house to play computers with cousins
3. Fijian girl	Help mother, do homework, play at the playground	Help mother, do homework, play at the playground	Help mother, do homework, play at the playground	Help mother, do homework, play at the playground	Help mother, do homework, play at the playground	School work	Church
4. Fijian boy	Homework, play, go to uncle's plantation	Homework, play, go to uncle's plantation	Homework, play, go to uncle's plantation	Homework, play, go to uncle's plantation	Jogging, go swimming at Suva Point	Church	Home



Figure 6. (a) McDonald's; (b) gardens/plantations; (c) churches; and (d) the market commonly featured on children's maps.

Cultivation is important, especially for boys who frequently work in the family garden/plantation after school (see child 4 in Table 3 and Figure 6b). Local produce is evident in many aspects of Fijian urban life through selling or buying at the city market, picking and/or buying coconuts, bread fruit or mangoes at local stalls (Figure 6d).

To assist in gaining a sense of how children use their neighbourhood and the wider city, they were asked to draw a map. This exercise enabled the authors to get a sense of the spatial extent of children's lives. Figure 7 summarizes the number of times on average that features were recorded on the maps. Overall, the commonest features shown were people, with maps on average showing between three and five people related features, e.g. neighbours, friends and relatives. The city featured much more prominently on Suva children's maps than comparative Dunedin maps (Suva (S) = 40%, Dunedin (D) = 3%), indicating to some extent their larger daily travel patterns where Suva children are more likely to pass through the city on their way to school. Suva children also stressed the importance of going into the city centre at weekends. When the individual feature types shown in Figure 7 were looked at in detail, the biggest difference in the maps between Dunedin and Suva is that Suva children were much more likely to indicate services on their maps; bus stops (S = 38%, D = 7%), police posts (S = 30%, D = 0%), health centres (S = 12%, D = 0%), hospital (S = 8%, D = 0%), places of worship/church (S = 60% church and 6% temple, D = 12%), and the cemetery (S = 7%, D = 0%). The one instance where the Dunedin children significantly outnumbered Suva children was in named roads: 70% compared with Suva 7%. Overall Suva children's maps covered larger spatial areas of the city

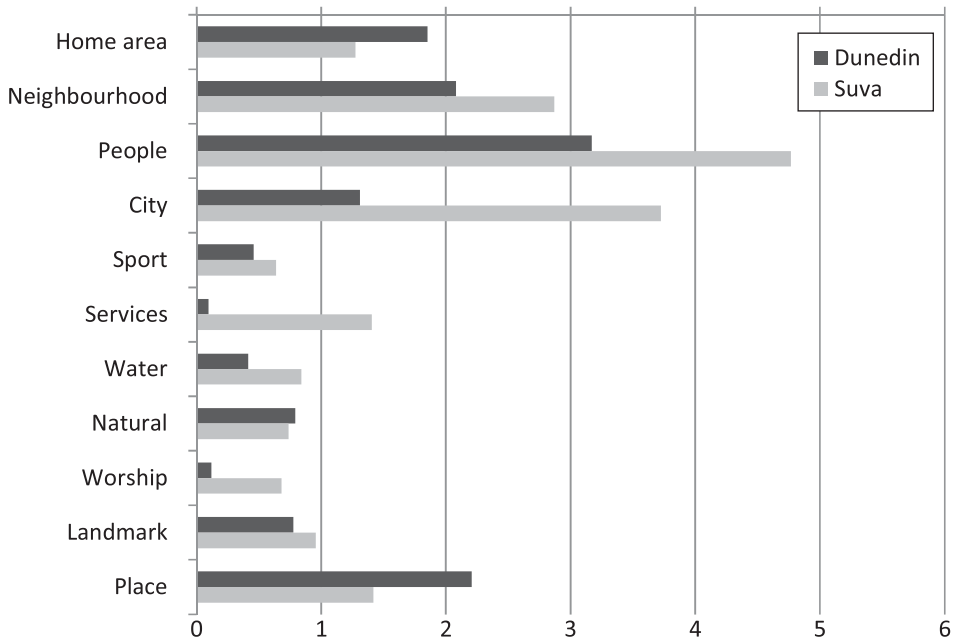


Figure 7. Number of times features were recorded on average on student's maps.

but also tended to be far less accurate in terms of layout. Thus many of the Dunedin maps could realistically indicate the location of places and features, whereas the Suva maps tended to be more symbolic with random location of features, again perhaps indicating a more mobile daily life. Evident on the maps were examples of what Horschelmann and van Blerk (2012) identify as indicators of globalization processes. Many Suva maps featured McDonald's (Figure 6a), KFC and international chains such as Village 6 cinemas. Some maps also featured internet shops and children mentioned watching television, movies/playing DVDs, and computer games at home after school and on weekends (Table 3, children 1 and 2).

Four maps are included here to show in some detail the city lives of children, their daily activities are also summarized. The first two maps (Figure 8a and b) are from Fijian children including one living in a "well established squatter settlement". Both maps show friends, neighbours, the family garden and church. The first also shows city centre features such as the market, Village 6 cinema and a number of sports complexes. The maps (Figure 8c and d) are by Indo-Fijian children and both show large spatial areas. In the map shown in Figure 8c there is a clear emphasis on shops, e.g. Tappoo and MHCC (city centre malls); it also shows McDonald's and many services. The final map shown in Figure 8d is interesting as it includes neighbourhood features but also places elsewhere on the main island, namely Sigatoka and Nadi (a three- to four-hour drive away) and again shops and services feature strongly. In general Indo-Fijian children did tend to focus more on services, were less likely to show gardens and local social connections perhaps indicative of the fact few roamed freely even in their local neighbourhood.

(UNCRC) not being met (UNICEF 2011). The growing rate of urbanization means that despite increasing housing, education and other service provision, unmet needs are still growing. Basic needs provisions such as water, housing, health, sanitation, roads, etc. remain key challenges for urban planners. Within the context of these urbanization challenges, what insights can be derived from the research?

Transport. As already mentioned, children in Suva can experience a wide spatial geography (Karsten 2005) in their daily lives, traversing, usually independently, large areas of the city to access school, services, and for economic and social reasons. Key access points include schools, the city centre, churches, the market, local and city centre shops, health centres and sports venues. Public transport systems play an important role in this respect with children being frequent users of buses. Their use needs to be taken into account in public transport developments. The fact that there is currently a limited private car culture that presents opportunities to build on the already extensive taxi and bus services, creating effective and sustainable transport networks. Children are also pedestrians and need safe footpaths, road crossings and generally safe streets, especially at night when few children felt safe. The swampy nature of parts of the city, with unformed paths, created access issues for some children in getting to school after rainfall.

Social connectivity. Social factors were paramount in children's assessment of their urban environments. The primary negative factor was a feeling of being unsafe in relation to antisocial behaviour from adults in the neighbourhood, mainly at night. However, this did not detract from the fact that children overwhelmingly described their neighbourhoods as friendly, with people they could go to for help and which they in turn helped. They valued having places to meet friends; these were usually informal locally based public spaces such as playgrounds, fields, church grounds, and spaces in the compounds and 'gardens' surrounding homes and blocks of flats. As there is limited meeting of friends inside houses, these outdoor spaces are especially valued. It is important that public spaces, such as sports fields and informal gathering spaces, are protected and enhanced in the face of local housing development pressures. Suva has few formal parks and sports fields; most used by the children are informal ones. Facilities such as parks, cinemas, shops and the swimming pool tend to be centralized in the city centre rather than being distributed across the urban fabric, limiting accessibility.

International research has identified that as a consequence of urbanization processes and leading more pressured lives, children (and adults) in a number of Western countries (Honoré 2009) are becoming less connected to their home neighbourhood and the people who live there. The present study was interested in seeing whether this social disconnect was occurring amongst children living in Suva. Social connection is important to Suva children; people feature is the most frequent map feature (as indicated in Figure 7). The presence of friends and good neighbours is a strong determinant of whether children like their neighbourhood and, conversely, the strongest dislike is "nothing". (Figure 4a and b). Though children may travel outside their neighbourhood for school, their social connections were strongest with their neighbourhood. This is different to the Dunedin study where friends and school were closely connected.

The neighbourhood is an important site for friendships and as a consequence for connecting socially with the neighbourhood. As Christensen and O'Brien stress; "living in the city is as much about negotiating relationships with other humans as it is about living in material spaces and places" (Christensen and O'Brien 2003, 1). In Suva children varied in how they negotiated these relationships, even whilst living in similar physical environments. There seems to be a difference in social connection for Indo-Fijian and Fijian children, with Indo-Fijian children less likely to mix with neighbourhood children; they go outside their compounds less and were less likely to talk about people in their neighbourhood. There seems to be little mixing between Indo-Fijian and Fijian children socially, but this needs further exploration to decipher it properly.

The move away from wider neighbourhood connections and the retreat to the domestic/home realm for children observed elsewhere (Malone 2007) does seem to be occurring, especially for Indo-Fijian children and for children attending a more 'desirable' school where children are more likely to commute out of their neighbourhood. Certainly the urban children did not have the strong social and neighbourhood connections noted in a later part of the study in a Fijian village school. The authors anticipate that the declining neighbourhood connection observed elsewhere is happening in Suva but is likely at an earlier stage in the process. One very positive move in this regard is the Fiji government's school policy change. This gives absolute right of entry to students to attend school in their home zone. Where necessary the government will provide full transport assistance to eligible students, but students attending schools outside their zone will be required to pay their own transport costs. It is intended that zoning will "remove social stratifications such as parent's occupation, socio-economic status, ethnicity and religious affiliations" (UNICEF 2011, 21). The policy could assist in overcoming some of the strong ethnic separation between Fijian and Indo-Fijian children in their home neighbourhoods, as observed in this study, as it encourages the breakdown of ethnically segregated schools. Though not the intended outcome of the policy change, as shown in the Dunedin study (Freeman 2010), attendance at the local school is positively related to enhanced neighbourhood connection.

Urban Planning and Design: Where Next?

Key issues for urban designers and planners in Fiji include the need to provide for children's basic needs, to support places of social connection, build on and support public transport and safe pedestrian routes, and to provide accessible recreational and other services (Ministry for National Planning 2009). While these provisions are self-evident in their need, there are problems that arise as a consequence of the paucity of planning and urban design resources available in the city. The limited scale of forward planning and poorly developed participation processes available generally for adults means the potential for children gaining input into planning the future for Suva is slight. In this sense, though, Fiji is no different to many other countries in both the majority and minority worlds where children's participation in planning processes is underdeveloped and undervalued.

This paper now returns to the words of Connell: "Predictions for the future of small islands and island states are invariably pessimistic" (Connell 2010, 115).

It could be asserted that this is not the case for the children in Suva who took part in this study, whose ability to see their lives and the places in which they live positively is a constructive one and provides a salutary lesson for those working in Pacific urbanization. Strong current trends towards urbanization associated with seeking better education, employment, healthcare and access to services generally, combined with predicted escalation of change associated with climate change, resource pressure, population growth and other factors, mean that the future of the Pacific will be an urban one. The dilemma facing Fiji is neatly summed up by Connell who identifies both the advantages and the challenges that will face the country as it urbanizes, and shapes the world in which the children in this study will grow up:

Cities are centres of educational, political and economic power, symbols of nationhood—however flawed—and places of cultural diversity as well as economic opportunity and social development. Translating advantages for a few into more broadly based urban development is not, however, easy. It is not inevitable that urbanization should be unmanageable and that problems should worsen, yet the combination of weak economies, overburdened bureaucracies, urban unemployment, fractured social networks and uneven development challenge notions of sustainable development (Connell 2011, 133).

For the children of Fiji, continuation of an increasing predominance of an urban lifestyle seems a likely scenario. It is imperative that this urban environment proves to be one conducive to their physical and social well-being (Curtain and Vakaoti 2011). There are several concerning trends in this regard. Population migration and natural growth patterns are expected to continue with urban growth, primarily concentrated in Suva being variously estimated at around 1.5% per annum (Asian Development Bank 2012). This is liable to be a conservative figure as there has been overall growth from 301,001 (1990) to 459,572 (2010)⁵ with this growth occurring over a period characterized by ongoing outmigration from Fiji, especially of Indo-Fijians (Bedford and Hugo 2012). With urban growth there has been: a “noted increased in the number and density of informal settlements in many cities [...] the 2006 Greater Urban Management Plan records 50 informal settlements in the Greater Suva urban Area. This number had risen to over 100 by 2011” (UN-Habitat 2012, 8). Thus, much urban growth is occurring in these settlements where service provision is least effective. Further problems are predicted as a result of anticipated climate change. Fiji’s urban areas are located on the coast, areas likely to be most impacted by climate change, including cyclones, storm surge, flooding and inundation especially of already low-lying areas (often home to children in this study), all of which have consequences for health and well-being. The UN-Habitat report notes that “there is no budget allocation in municipalities for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management” (UN-Habitat 2012, 8). In Fiji urban development and its associated challenges can be expected to continue and increase their impact on children’s lives unless resources are found and allocated to redress them. At present such redress is beyond the capacity of Fiji’s planning system. At the time of writing Suva was the only municipality with a town planner (UN-Habitat 2012).

What then does this mean for children in urban Fiji? Children embrace their urban life-worlds, they value the social connections their neighbourhoods offer,

they value and use the services and opportunities the city provides and show resilience in the face of a dynamic and challenging environment. They show remarkable ability to move between the cultures of their traditional Fijian and global environments. However, their resilience and optimism is not limitless and can only thrive in a supportive environment that meets their basic physical and social needs. As yet, the authors have seen little indication that children are a significant planning concern in Fiji or that they will be treated as active participants in going forward in an urbanizing Fiji.

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Notes

1. *Children's Urban Environments: Changing Worlds*, by Freeman and Tranter (2011), explores children's use of and relationship with the spaces that make up the urban environment, home, school, neighbourhood, city centre etc.
2. In this paper Fijian refers to indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian as children belonging to the Indian ethnic group.
3. Altogether some 199 children from eight schools in Fiji and Kiribati have been interviewed as part of the wider study, but this paper only includes children living in attending the three city schools in Suva.
4. An area surrounding the house and within its fenced or otherwise demarcated boundaries.
5. Statistics for urban population are variable with this figure being higher than that used in the previously mentioned UN-Habitat report, but all population statistics regardless of which areal unit is used indicate a rapid growth scenario. These figures are World Bank Indicators: Fiji, density and urbanization; see <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/fiji/urban-population-percent-of-total-wb-data.html/>.

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